COLLECTOR'S CORNER #79 APRIL 16, 1976
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CHICAGO'S MALTESE FALCONER
(INSERTS AVAILABLE IN TAPE LIBRARY)

ANNCR: AND NOW, COLLECTOR'S CORNER...THE VOICE OF AMERICA SERIES OF PROGRAMS FOR PEOPLE WHO COLLECT THINGS -- WHETHER THEY BE STAMPS OR COINS, SNUFF BOTTLES OR OLD AUTOS, OR MERELY BALLS OF STRING. HERE IS ---------- WITH THE STORY ABOUT A MAN ... AND A LEGENDARY PIECE OF SCULPTURE.

NARR: TOM ALDERMAN IS A PUBLIC-RELATIONS MAN WHO WORKS FOR THE GOVERNOR OF ILLINOIS. BUT THE VARIED ASSORTMENT OF OLD POSTERS AND PHOTOGRAPHS IN HIS OFFICE SHOWS THAT HE IS ALSO A MOVIE BUFF (FAN) WITH A STRONG TASTE FOR THE HOLLYWOOD EPICS OF THE NINETEEN-THIRTIES, FORTIES AND FIFTIES.

ONE MOVIE FROM THAT ERA...A MURDER MYSTERY CALLED "THE MALTESE FALCON," WAS MADE IN NINETEEN-FORTY ONE AND STARRED HUMPHREY BOGART AS A PRIVATE DETECTIVE TRYING TO MAKE SENSE OUT OF A BIZARRE SERIES OF CRIMES AND EVENTS RELATED TO THE FIGURINE OF A BLACK FALCON. TOM SAW THAT MOVIE WHEN HE WAS GROWING UP AND NEVER FORGOT IT:

TAPE: CUT ONE -- ALDERMAN

"I'VE ALWAYS WANTED THE BIRD, EVER SINCE I WAS A YOUNGSTER, WHEN I SAW THE (HUMPHREY) BOGART MOVIE. I RECALL THE LAST LINE IN THE MOVIE, AND I DON'T KNOW IF YOU REMEMBER IT... BUT WE HAVE THIS ENTIRE MOVIE WHERE PEOPLE ARE LYING AND STEALING AND KILLING TO POSSESS THIS BIRD. EVERYBODY'S CARTED OFF TO JAIL AND SAM SPADE, PLAYED BY HUMPHREY BOGART, IS HOLDING THE THING (THE BIRD), AND A DETECTIVE TURNS TO HIM AND SAYS 'WHAT IS THAT THING, ANYWAY, SAM?'

TAPE: (CONT) AND BOGART LOOKS AT HIM, HOLDING THE BIRD, AND SAYS '... THIS?...THIS IS THE STUFF THAT DREAMS ARE MADE OF.' AND AS SOON AS I HEARD THAT, I KNEW THAT I HAD TO HAVE THE BIRD BECAUSE, AFTER ALL, THAT'S WHAT I THINK A LOT OF US ARE AFTER...THE STUFF THAT DREAMS ARE MADE OF."

NARR: THE STORY OF THE MALTESE FALCON WAS FIRST TOLD BY AUTHOR DASHIELL HAMMETT IN A NINETEEN-TWENTY NINE BOOK. IN IT, HE TRACED THE BIRD'S HISTORY BACK TO THE SPAIN OF THE MIDDLE AGES. THE BIRD WAS SAID TO BE CRAFTED OF SOLID GOLD AND JEWELED AS A TRIBUTE TO THE SPANISH KING BY A WEALTHY CLAN OF KNIGHTS CALLED THE ORDER OF RHODES. AS HAMMETT TELLS IT, THE 25-CENTIMETER FIGURE WAS STOLEN EN ROUTE TO THE KING AND THEN CHANGED HANDS FOR CENTURIES, WRAPPED IN INTRIGUE AND COVERED WITH A COAT OF BLACK PAINT TO DISGUISE ITS VALUE:

TAPE: CUT TWO -- ALDERMAN

"THE INTERESTING THING ABOUT THE BIRD AND ABOUT THIS WHOLE CAPER THAT INVOLVES ME IS THAT THE LINE BETWEEN FANTASY AND REALITY IS CROSSED SO MANY TIMES, YOU'RE NEVER QUITE SURE WHERE YOU ARE. HAMMETT IN HIS BOOK, AND IN THE BOGART MOVIE, LAYS OUT A HISTORY OF THE MALTESE FALCON DATING BACK TO 1503, AND HAMMETT IN HIS BOOK GIVES HISTORICAL REFERENCES FOR THE ACTUAL BIRD. SO YOU'RE NEVER QUITE SURE IF THE BIRD REALLY EXISTED OR WHETHER IT WAS THE FIGMENT OF A WRITER'S IMAGINATION."

NARR: WHEN ALDERMAN HEARD LAST YEAR THAT A SATIRE OF THE 1941 MOVIE WAS TO BE RELEASED BY COLUMBIA PICTURES, HE WROTE AND ASKED IF HE COULD BUY A REPLICA OF THE FAMOUS FALCON. THEY SAID NO. BUT NOT LONG AFTERWARDS, HE SAW A PHOTOGRAPH OF THE FIGURINE IN AN ADVERTISEMENT. SO HE WROTE TO COLUMBIA PICTURES AGAIN, THIS TIME JOKINGLY TELLING THEM THAT IF HE DID NOT RECEIVE THE BIRD SOON,

NARR: (CONT) HE WOULD GO TO NEW YORK AND STEAL IT. IN JANUARY HE GOT A REPLY FROM A COLUMBIA EXECUTIVE WHO WROTE TO SAY THAT THE BIRD WAS ON ITS WAY. AS PART OF THE FUN, THE EXECUTIVE TOLD TOM THAT HE MUST SEND COLUMBIA THE LABELS FROM TWO JARS OF OVALTINE CHOCOLATE DRINK AND THE TOP FROM A BOX OF RALSTON PURINA CEREAL...A NOSTALGIC REFERENCE TO THE OLD-FASHIONED MARKETING PRACTICE USED DURING THE FORTIES FOR GIVING AWAY MERCHANDISE. THAT'S WHEN THE TROUBLE STARTED:

TAPE: CUT THREE -- ALDERMAN

"WHEN I RECEIVED THE BIRD IN JANUARY, I SENT HIM THE TWO OVALTINE LABELS AND THE RALSTON (PURINA) BOX TOP, IN DUE CONSIDERATION FOR THE BIRD. THEN I GOT A (TELEPHONE) CALL THE VERY NEXT DAY, AFTER I RECEIVED IT FROM COLUMBIA, TELLING ME THAT THEY HAD MADE A MISTAKE AND THAT THEY HAD SENT ME THE REAL BIRD...THE ONE USED IN THE MOVIE. SOME MAY CALL THAT A MISTAKE. I CALL IT FATE."

NARR: FOR TOM ALDERMAN, THAT ACT OF FATE WAS CONSISTENT WITH THE FALCON'S HISTORY. FOR IT HAS NEVER REALLY BEEN WHAT IT SEEMED EITHER TO HUMPHREY BOGART OR TO COLUMBIA PICTURES:

TAPE: CUT FOUR -- ALDERMAN

"THE BIRD THAT BOGART GETS IS NOT THE REAL BIRD, IF YOU REMEMBER THE MOVIE. IT TURNS OUT TO BE A PHONY. BUT THAT PROP BIRD, WHICH I NOW HAVE, THROUGH A SERIES OF WHAT I CALL FATE AND WHAT COLUMBIA MIGHT CALL A MISTAKE, I NOW HAVE. AND HERE IS WHERE THE FANTASY AND REALITY HAVE CROSSED LINES. BECAUSE I HAVE IT. AND BECAUSE IN FANTASY, IT WAS AN OBJECT TO BE POSSESSED SINCE I HAVE GOTTEN IT, EVERYBODY WANTS IT."

NARR: SINCE JANUARY, ALDERMAN HAS RECEIVED A NUMBER OF LATE NIGHT TELEPHONE CALLS ASKING ABOUT THE BIRD. THERE

NARR: (CONT) HAVE BEEN ATTEMPTED BURGLARIES AT HIS HOUSE AND HIS OFFICE TO GET THE BIRD. AND THERE HAS BEEN LOTS OF MAIL. HE EVEN GOT A NOTE ABOUT THE BIRD SCRIBBLED ON THE BOX IN WHICH HIS SHIRTS CAME BACK FROM THE LAUNDRY. COLUMBIA HAS PROMISED TO GIVE HIM FIVE REPLICAS OF THE FIGURINE IN RETURN FOR THE ORIGINAL, BUT ALDERMAN WILL HAVE NONE OF IT:

TAPE: CUT FIVE -- ALDERMAN

"I INTEND TO KEEP IT FOREVER. I'VE HAD OFFERS TO SELL IT. I DO NOT WANT TO SELL IT. I DO NOT WANT TO MAKE MONEY OFF THE MALTESE FALCON. AFTER ALL, I DON'T WANT TO MAKE MONEY OFF MY DREAMS. I WON'T LOCK IT UP IN A VAULT. THAT WOULD BE LIKE LOCKING UP A LITTLE OF YOUR DREAMS. I WANT IT OUT AND I WANT TO ENJOY IT."

NARR: SINCE SO MANY PEOPLE ARE NOW INTERESTED IN THE FIGURINE, TOM WANTS TO BRING IT TO A CHICAGO THEATER AND SHOW IT ALONG WITH THE ORIGINAL "MALTESE FALCON" FILM AND ITS RECENT SPOOF, TO BENEFIT CHARITY. BECAUSE FOR TOM, THE WHOLE THING HAS BEEN THE UNEXPECTED FULFILLMENT OF A CHILDHOOD DREAM -- A DREAM WHICH HE WANTS TO SHARE:

TAPE: CUT SIX -- ALDERMAN

"IT'S BEEN AN AWFUL LOT OF FUN. I ENJOY THE MALTESE FALCON, I ENJOY HAVING IT. I WANT TO KEEP IT. I WILL TAKE IT OUT IN PUBLIC IF PEOPLE WANT TO SEE IT FOR CHARITY. I DON'T WANT TO MAKE ANY MONEY FROM IT. I WANT TO HOLD ON TO THE STUFF THAT DREAMS ARE MADE OF."

ANNCR: THIS HAS BEEN COLLECTOR'S CORNER...WITH THE STORY OF THE MALTESE FALCON, WHOSE JOURNEYS HAVE BROUGHT IT INTO THE HANDS OF ONE OF ITS MOST ARDENT ADMIRERS...HE THINKS. JOIN US NEXT WEEK (AT THIS TIME) FOR ANOTHER

ANNCR: (CONT) LOOK INTO THE COLLECTOR'S CORNER ON THE VOICE OF AMERICA. I'M ----------.

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